

# “A Knowledge of the Useful”: Economy in Mary Hays’s *Family Annals, or the Sisters*

Li-ching Chen

## ABSTRACT

This article seeks to reassess Mary Hays’s underappreciated last novel, *Family Annals, or the Sisters* (1817), to trace the novel’s philosophical complexity and Hays’s persisting and yet evolving radicalism in the later stage of her career. Through a close study of the novel, this article explores Hays’s system of economic education and her utilization of the new type of novel as a means to promote it with a view to bringing about social reforms. It expounds on Hays’s critical engagement with not only the educational theories delineated in John Locke’s *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) and Claude Adrien Helvétius’s *A Treatise on Man, His Intellectual Faculties and His Education* (1772), but also the notions of economy expressed in Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth’s *Practical Education* (1798). It further demonstrates how Hays remained unswayed by custom and prejudice, which set her apart from Locke, Helvétius, and the Edgeworths. Finally, it contends that Hays’s employment of the novel’s instructive power worked in tandem with her egalitarian approach to economy intended to equip a much wider public, including those lower down the social ladder, with the useful knowledge and self-esteem that would enable them to live out the dignity of independence.

**KEYWORDS** Mary Hays, *Family Annals, or the Sisters*, economy, education, equality, critiques of primogeniture

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*Ex-position*, Issue No. 44, December 2020 | National Taiwan University  
DOI: 10.6153/EXP.202012\_(44).0006

**Li-ching CHEN**, Associate Professor, Department of Western Languages and Literature, National University of Kaohsiung, Taiwan

In the Preface to her last novel, *Family Annals, or the Sisters* (1817), Mary Hays (1759-1843) praises Maria Edgeworth (1768-1849) for bringing about “a revolution in works of imagination” which, in contrast to the “ancient romance” and “the modern novel,” “happily and inseparably” blend “amusement and instruction.” She asserts that it is the combination of education and entertainment that allows both to be spread more pervasively, and that her wish to cooperate with Edgeworth and many other sister writers in enlivening and cultivating the mind of the reader inspired her to utilize her literary talent once more, after it had been laid aside for years.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, much earlier in her career, Hays had expressed her views on the purpose of novel writing in an essay she wrote for the *Monthly Magazine* in 1797. Like Jane Austen (1775-1817), who cannot bear pictures of perfect characters in imaginative works,<sup>2</sup> Hays contends that novelists should present the world as it is, not as an illusion; they should “paint it as it really exists, mingled with imperfection, and discoloured by passion. . . . Gradations, almost imperceptible, of light and shade, must mingle in every true portrait of the human mind” (“On Novel Writing” 180). As for the novelist’s language, Hays maintains that it should be “simple, unaffected, perspicuous, yet energetic, touching, and impressive” (181). Moreover, Hays is convinced of the novel’s strength of instruction. In her view, it is not requisite that a novel should include “a formal and didactic moral”; it will perform its function if it tends “to raise the mind by elevated sentiments, to warm the heart with generous affections, to enlarge our views, or to increase our stock of useful knowledge” (181).

A “formal and didactic moral” might not be a prerequisite for a novel in Hays’s view, yet it was common for her contemporary writers espousing different politics—radicals, moderates, and antirevolutionaries—to propound ideas for their respective causes in their fictitious works.<sup>3</sup> Active during the post-Revolutionary

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This article is an extended version of the paper with the same title which the author presented in the BARS (British Association for Romantic Studies) 2017 conference. The author would like to thank Coral Ann Howells and Carolyn D. Williams as well as the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions. Thanks are also due to the Ministry of Science and Technology, Taiwan, for sponsoring the travel and conference expenses (MOST 106-2914-I-390-003-A1).

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Johnson (1709-1784) defines “economy” as “the management of a family” and “the government of a household” in *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). And the term “economy” is applied almost interchangeably with “domestic economy” and “household economy” in conduct books for women in Georgian England (Munro 96; Gregory 21; Chen, “Conduct Books’ Advice” 7-8). Throughout this article, the term “economy” will be used in this sense as it was prevalently acknowledged and understood in England in the long eighteenth century.

<sup>2</sup> Jane Austen to Fanny Knight, Chawton, 23-25 March 1817 (335).

<sup>3</sup> Wood, page 13 in particular.

era, when “the war of ideas” reached its height, these writers recognized the novel’s being an “expedient” tool for their ends.<sup>4</sup> For women writers especially, novels with didactic messages functioned not only as “an effective avenue” (Havens 16) but also as “a means” (King 203) to empower them to participate in public debate. As a consequence, while radical women writers such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) utilized the novel to propagate democratic notions in relation to gender and rank, conservative women writers like Hannah More (1745-1833) and Jane West (1758-1852) exploited the genre both to promote antirevolutionary messages and to counteract the “pleasant poison” that they believed revolutionary novels had treacherously disseminated to the reading public.<sup>5</sup>

Being an autodidact who received most of her early education through perusing novels and romances,<sup>6</sup> Mary Hays was intimately acquainted with the instructive power of the novel. Hays’s role as an educator for young people was well recognized in the first few decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> But it was somehow neglected and quite forgotten in the second half of the century, and continued to be so for nearly the whole of the twentieth.<sup>8</sup> In the course of the past two decades, her reputation as a pioneering feminist and educationist has slowly

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<sup>4</sup> Wood 12, 15, 25. The phrase, “the war of ideas,” is adopted from the title of Marilyn Butler’s *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (1987), a book that “sets out to show that the novels of Austen’s day, hers included, were full of signs which conveyed opinions” (xiv).

<sup>5</sup> Wood 11, 14. For the “rhetoric of corruption, contamination, and poison,” see Wood 11-30.

<sup>6</sup> Mary Hays to Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867), Islington, 14 February 1806 (*Correspondence* 570).

<sup>7</sup> Hays published books of a variety of genres in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Her books for young people—*Harry Clinton; or, A Tale of Youth* (1804); *Historical Dialogues for Young Persons* (1806-1808); *The Brothers; or, Consequences: A Story of What Happens Every Day* (1815); and *Family Annals, or the Sisters* (1817)—came out in succession after the publication of her encyclopedic work on distinguished women’s lives—*Female Biography; or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of All Ages and Countries* (1803), on which, according to Edmund Kell (1799-1874), “her reputation most depend[ed]” (814).

<sup>8</sup> Apart from *The Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson, Barrister-at-Law, F.S.A.* (1869), Kell’s “Memoir of Mary Hays” (1844) is probably the last publication in the nineteenth century we can locate that mentions Hays’s name and/or the titles of her works. On the envelope of a letter dated 26 November 1814 from Hays, Robinson—a longstanding friend to 1799—stated, “MH was the friend of Mrs Woolstonecraft but somewhat pedantic and rather ridiculous. The Author of forgotten novels An ultra liberal” (sic; *Correspondence* 576). Moreover, according to A. F. Wedd—Hays’s great grandniece and editor of *The Love-Letters of Mary Hays (1779-1780)* published in 1925—Hays and her works had long been buried in obscurity before Wedd’s book came out. In Wedd’s “Story of Mary Hays,” she concludes: “Mary Hays is now unknown; her books are unread; even her connection with the literary celebrities of her day has been forgotten” (14). Interestingly, Wedd’s biography of Hays reveals that she did not have a full knowledge of Hays’s published writings: *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, *The Victim of Prejudice*, *Female Biography*, *Historical Dialogues* and *Memoirs of Queens* were the only works she knew authored by Hays (9, 11-13). And because of Wedd’s “amused dismissal” of Hays (Walker, “An Extraordinary Destiny” 128), Hays’s works did not arouse much interest in the reading public after the publication of her *Love-Letters*. Above all, as Walker’s account of the difficulties she has encountered over more than forty years in “creating an accurate female biography of Mary Hays” (124) shows, few studies on Hays were conducted before the 1990s.

yet steadily revived. Scholars such as Gina Luria Walker, Marilyn L. Brooks, Caroline Franklin, Eleanor Ty, Helena Bergmann, Timothy Whelan, and many others have conducted investigations into Hays's life and writings.<sup>9</sup> While her first two novels, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) and *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799), have received growing recognition and stimulated discussions in a variety of disciplines, the last one—*Family Annals, or the Sisters*—has so far attracted scant attention.

Nevertheless, the intertextualities between *Family Annals* and the economic and educational thoughts of Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733), John Locke (1632-1704), and Claude Adrien Helvétius (1715-1771) were touched upon by Walker in her Introduction to the Garland edition of *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798), published in 1974. There she notes that the novel in question “juxtapose[s] the doctrines of Mandeville with those of Locke and Helvetius” (14-15). Terence Allan Hoagwood also makes a link between *Family Annals* and Helvétius's pedagogical theory in his introductory article on *The Victim of Prejudice*, published in 1990. He comments that in the novel “Hays returns to the environmentalism of Helvetius, a set of arguments that she had treated in 1796 and 1797 in the *Monthly Magazine* during her more openly jacobin [sic] period” (Hoagwood 9).<sup>10</sup> However, both Walker and Hoagwood leave their assertions unexplained and their themes unexplored.

Through a close study of *Family Annals*, this article aims to explore Hays's system of economic education and her utilization of the new mode of novel as a means to promote it with a view to bringing about social reforms. It will unravel Hays's consistent radicalism through examining her critical engagement in the discourses of education and of economy: firstly by associating her emphasis on the importance of early education, and on the central role habits play in an individual's well-being, with the theories delineated in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) by John Locke and in *A Treatise on Man, His Intellectual Faculties and His Education* (1772) by Claude Adrien Helvétius;<sup>11</sup> and secondly by comparing and contrasting the multifarious economic practices illustrated in the novel with the notions of economy expressed in the last chapter “On Prudence and Economy” of *Practical Education* (1798) coauthored by Richard Lovell Edgeworth (1744-1817) and his daughter Maria, to which Hays's vindication of Bernard

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<sup>9</sup> See Walker, *Growth*; Brooks; Franklin; Ty; Bergmann; and Whelan, *Mary Hays*.

<sup>10</sup> Here the term “environmentalism” refers to the theory that stresses environment's immense impact on the development of a person.

<sup>11</sup> The surname Helvétius will be presented in its French form throughout this article except in the cases of quotations and titles that originally spell it in its English form “Helvetius.”

Mandeville will be added. It will further observe that in addition to her portrayal of the economic models—“a wise economy” and “improvidence” (the latter as a consequence of miseducation)—for readers to emulate or to shun, Hays was innovative in inserting both moral teachings and social criticism into her discourse on economy. Finally, this article will contend that Hays’s dexterous application of the novel’s instructive power and her egalitarian take on economy worked together to equip a much wider public, including those lower down the social ladder, with the useful knowledge and self-esteem that would enable them to be independent and free.

**Economy in  
Mary Hays’s  
*Family Annals,  
or the Sisters***

### **Mary Hays’s System of Economic Education**

In *Family Annals*, while Hays persisted in encoding her advocacy of gender equality, a cause which she had been committed to since the 1790s and a matter that will be examined in greater detail later,<sup>12</sup> she devoted most of her efforts to the dissemination of practical knowledge. She aimed at educating not only women but also men (young adults in particular), including those of the laboring class, whom she deemed the “most useful part of the community,” as she hoped to benefit a much wider public.<sup>13</sup> She made use of the novel—a genre that she considered a “powerful and effective engine of truth and reform” (“On Novel Writing” 181)—to inculcate in the reader the knowledge vitally necessary to people of all classes, which would facilitate their diurnal dealings and be indispensable to their happiness in this life.

Economy was the useful knowledge Hays embedded so diligently in her new story of the Seymour family. This branch of knowledge was generally considered by many eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century conduct book writers as a science of household management covering all domestic affairs: the expenditure of revenue, including the distribution of charity; the education of children; the supervision of the household, a subdivision consisting partly in the superintendence of servants; industry and time management, and much more besides.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> See Hays’s first two novels *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) and *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799); and feminist manifestos, *Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous* (1793) and *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women* (1798). See also Walker, *Growth*; Bergmann; Chen, “This Eccentric Step” 44-49.

<sup>13</sup> The full title of *The Brothers* is *The Brothers; or Consequences. A Story of What Happens Every Day. Addressed to That Most Useful Part of the Community, the Labouring Poor*. See the review of this novel by *The Gentleman’s Magazine* (251).

<sup>14</sup> For the notion of economy within the eighteenth-century English social and cultural contexts, see Chen’s “Conduct Books’ Advice.”

These conduct manual writers assiduously impressed upon their fair readers the importance of economy and advised them to practice accordingly (Chen, “Conduct Books’ Advice” 9). In fact, Hays’s unremitting quest for financial independence, and intimate acquaintance with those bitter monetary trials endured by close friends such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Charlotte Smith (1749-1806), and Eliza Fenwick (1766-1840) had taught her economy’s centrality to an individual’s well-being.<sup>15</sup> She, therefore, drew up in *Family Annals* a system of economic education, engaging at once with the discourses of education and of economy. Hays dedicated this novel to Fenwick in particular as a testimony of their enduring friendship. For she believed that Fenwick would appreciate such life wisdom, owing to the latter’s long and immense suffering from a series of pecuniary calamities caused by her husband’s habitual carelessness about monetary matters and his subsequent ruin, and was then living with her children in Barbados to rebuild their credit and lives.<sup>16</sup>

This educational manual on economy, cast in the format of fiction, conforms to the theories on the principles of novel writing Hays published in 1797. She conveyed her teachings of the subject concerned through dialogues, letters, and occasional narration in simple and straightforward language. In addition, she transformed relevantly elite material—including the educational theories of Locke and Helvétius, as well as instructions on economy published by Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth—into digestible information that could be more easily accessed, comprehended, and, most importantly, put into practice by a larger portion of the population.

Economy and its various subdivisions, including the education of children, the management of money, and the supervision of the household, constitute the central subject of *Family Annals* as they apply to the Seymour family. The chief focus is on the financial management of the sisters, Ellen (who serves as the author’s mouthpiece) and Charlotte; considerable attention is also devoted to their brother, young Mr. Seymour. Opening the story with the disclosure of Charlotte’s recurring pecuniary embarrassment through the conversation between Mr. Seymour senior and his sister, Mrs. Percy, Hays sets the tone of her novel in the first chapter. She makes the rational, worldly, and seemingly impeccable Mr. Seymour (serving partially as her mouthpiece) engage in a debate on the multifarious ramifications of economy—the expenditure of pocket money and annual income, the effects of one’s financial status on making marriage choices, as well as

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<sup>15</sup> See Hays, “Mrs. Charlotte Smith”; *The Fate of the Fenwicks*; *Correspondence* 318-22, 344-60, 572-73. See also Todd; Fry; Chen, “This Eccentric Step” 29-31, 36-44.

<sup>16</sup> See Wedd, Introduction ix-xv; *The Fate of the Fenwicks* 1-187; *Correspondence* 318-22, 344-60, 572-73.

raising children—with his two daughters and Mrs. Percy. Through Mr. Seymour's disapproval of Charlotte's habitual improvidence and commendation of Ellen's simple dress and frugality, the excuses Mrs. Percy makes for Charlotte's repeated faults, and the Seymour sisters' views on the relationship between wealth and their marriage choices, as well as the two sisters' disparate characters and spending habits (1-30), Hays contrives to point out to the reader an affinity between Ellen and her father, and another between Charlotte and their aunt. By such associations, Hays aims to demonstrate the predominating influence of early education on an individual's habits and character.

Hays attributes Ellen's and Charlotte's widely dissimilar dispositions and lifestyles to their respective upbringing at an early age. While Ellen has been educated under the roof of their sensible and admirable father, with his good example set before her, Charlotte was sent to cultivate her artistic talents in London where she lived among its gay scenes and miscellaneous temptations with Mrs. Percy at the most critical and impressionable period of her life. Consequently, Ellen, the elder of the two, under the salutary influence of her father's example, grows to be sensible, modest, and prudent, whereas Charlotte turns out to be "vain, profuse, self-indulgent, inconsiderate" (6). In addition, while the habits of reading and frugality as well as "a taste for simple pleasures" (153) have been settled in the former, the latter, infatuated with the glamour and revelry in the metropolis, has acquired habits of profligacy and dissipation along with a taste for "artificial pleasures" (177).

Hays's association of the Seymour sisters' characters and habits with their education and environment accords with the theories on the primacy of early education and on the critical role habits play in an individual's well-being, as delineated in Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* and Helvétius's *A Treatise on Man, His Intellectual Faculties and His Education*. In truth, in the early 1790s, through her "personal contact with Nonconformist luminaries" such as Joseph Priestley (1733-1804), John Disney (1746-1816), and Hugh Worthington (1752-1813), Hays was able to "study the history of ideas" and expand her knowledge (Walker, *Growth* 90-91). As Walker points out, Hays "deepened her understanding of the materialist epistemologies of British freethinkers derived from Locke by reading Priestley's edition of Anthony Collin's *A Philosophical Inquiry Concerning Human Liberty* (1790) and his abridgement of David Hartley's *Theory of the Human Mind, on the Principles of the Association of Ideas* (1749, 1791)," and she "drew on these readings to develop an unconventional, personal program of self-improvement" (90). In addition, like many of her contemporaries in both England and France who were attracted to Helvétius's theories, which

“brought together Enlightenment thought and revolutionary action in France,” Hays was “captivated” by the writings of Helvétius (Walker, *Growth* 166; Brooks 369). The year 1796 should be “the earliest date” that provides evidence of Hays’s reading Helvétius (Walker, *Growth* 150n14). In this year Helvétius’s works were alluded to in several of her letters to William Godwin (1756-1836), and in a letter dated around 1796 from Hays’s favorite sister Elizabeth (c. 1765-1825), where she reveals her wish to follow Hays’s advice and “return to Helvetius with new vigour.”<sup>17</sup>

In their educational treatises, Locke and Helvétius concur on education’s determining role in the making of people. Locke believes that education is what makes the great difference in mankind. He asserts, “[O]f all the men we meet with, nine parts of ten are what they are, good or evil, useful or not, by their education” (Locke 2). And because men owe their manners and abilities mostly to their education, “great care is to be had of forming children’s minds, and giving them that seasoning early, which shall influence their lives always after” (32). In addition, Locke considers the primary aim of education to be the cultivation of good habits in children and the uprooting of ill ones. He observes that a child, when little, is like “white paper, or wax” that could “be molded and fashioned as one pleases” (245); therefore, parents need to take pains to settle good habits in their children. In regard to bad habits, Locke deems introducing contrary habits the most effective method to counteract them (112, 159, 168).

Helvétius, according to Walker, “promoted Locke’s view that all human beings begin life with equal mental competency” (*Growth* 135). A “disciple” of Locke’s, Helvétius contends that “[e]ducation makes us what we are.”<sup>18</sup> With firm confidence in education’s potency, he asserts that education can do everything: “There is nothing impossible to education: it makes the bear dance” (1: 279). In Helvétius’s view, “man is not born, but becomes what he is” (1: 173n). He is convinced that everything in us comes from without; all in us—such as virtue, humanity, understanding, and talents—are “acquisitions” (2: 8, 453).

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<sup>17</sup> *Correspondence* 481. See also Walker, *Growth* 150n14; Brooks 369-75; *Correspondence* 424-25, 430, 433, 439-40, 443, 458.

<sup>18</sup> Cumming 17; Helvétius 2: 395. Ian Cumming’s *Helvétius: His Life and Place in the History of Educational Thought* (1955) attests to Locke’s influence on Helvétius. Cumming depicts that Helvétius’s reading of Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689) at the time when he studied at Louis-le Grand “turned him away from scholastic logic. . . . He became a disciple to Locke . . . [and was] convinced that the only judges of his principles would be experience and reason” (17). In addition, Cumming observes that through Helvétius’s correspondence with Voltaire (1694-1778), “an enthusiastic admirer of Locke,” Helvétius was able to consult with Voltaire the difficulties he encountered in reading Locke’s works (26, 30). For the affinity between Helvétius’s and Locke’s pedagogical concepts, see, in particular, Cumming 176, 212.

He considers early education supremely important, arguing that instruction wields its power most efficaciously over a man in youth, for this is the period of time when he develops his tastes, character, and habits, which more often than not determine his future conduct (1: 25). Yet Helvétius points out that it is impossible for any two persons to receive the same education because of the interference of “chance,” which he defines as “the unknown concatenation of causes proper to produce such or such an effect” (1: 13, 37n). However, he maintains that the influence of chance is not without bounds, and that a good education can minimize the power that chance exerts on men’s understandings (1: 259-61, 361, 361n). Moreover, because of the faith he places in education, Helvétius is optimistic about the possibility of eradicating bad habits. He contends that when a person is still young, the faults and vices in them can be cured by education: “In general, as long as we are young enough to contract new habits, the sole incurable faults, and vices, are those we cannot correct without employing means of which morals, laws, or customs do not allow the practice”; for those habits which have been long established, it will simply take longer time to break them off (1: 279).

With such strong convictions of education’s overwhelming impact on the shaping of an individual and on the whole course of his or her life, neither Locke nor Helvétius can forbear from pointing out the detrimental consequences of miseducation, in order to warn parents and tutors against lapsing into it. Locke calls people’s attention to the enduring mischief false education may incur: “[E]rrors in education should be less indulged than any. These, like faults in the first concoction, that are never mended in the second or third, carry their afterwards incorrigible taint with them, through all the parts and stations of life” (iv). Helvétius shares Locke’s view on the indelible effect of bad education. He is of the opinion that a bad education will keep mankind in the state of imbecility forever. With sarcasm he remarks: “[L]et no one be astonished at human imbecility: men, being in general badly educated, are what they ought to be; their extreme credulity rarely leaving them the free exercise of their reason, they in consequence form wrong judgements and are unhappy” (2: 340-41).

Nonetheless, though Locke and Helvétius both agree on the wonders that education is capable of performing and on the harm it may do to people, they disagree on whether there are any inborn propensities in man, and on whether a child should be educated at home or at school. While Locke conceives that men begin life with “native propensitives,” which foster “his predominate passions, and prevailing inclinations” (111), proposing that education should be tailored to suit

each child's individuality, and is in favor of domestic education,<sup>19</sup> Helvétius argues that all human character is a matter of "acquisition" and supports school.

As Graham A. J. Rogers contends, Locke argues for "the superiority of private tutoring for the education of young gentlemen" in his "enormously influential work" *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, which "remains a standard source in the philosophy of education." Locke thinks educating a child at home within his father's sight and under a good tutor is the most effective way to instruct him according to the father's wishes, and is also the best means to guard him from potential contagion lurking among the youth at school (67-70). In his view, being educated under his father's roof, a child will be able to assimilate all the examples of good conduct that the father and the qualified tutor, being virtuous and talented, set for him, and to learn of worldly affairs through participating in the conversation of a variety of learned and well-bred visitors to his home (70). Interestingly, the features that Locke depicts as the advantages of domestic education are precisely those that compel Helvétius to side with school. Helvétius maintains, "[T]hat education is the best where the child, most distant from his parents, has least opportunity of mixing incoherent ideas with those he ought to acquire in the course of his studies" (2: 400). To ensure the success of a school education, Helvétius suggests that a child should be persistently kept away from his parents' residence: "[I]t is necessary that he be almost always absent from the paternal dwelling; and that he do not return in the vacations and holidays, to catch again, from a conversation with the people of the world, the vices his fellow-pupils had effaced" (2: 400). Helvétius's advice of keeping children away from home all the time may sound "extravagant."<sup>20</sup> Yet this might be due to his strong conviction of a variety of merits that school can offer. In Helvétius's opinion, school is conducive to the health of the pupils, it imposes order on the pupils' lives, it inspires emulation among fellow pupils, and the preceptors in schools are not only well-trained in the discipline of pedagogy but also firm with the pupils (2: 401-02). Most importantly, school provides an environment where a child can concentrate on his subjects without being confused by unintelligible notions that may prevent him from making progress (2: 400-01).

Indeed, Hays was well acquainted with Locke's and Helvétius's theories concerning education, and supported many of their views. Proof of this appears

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<sup>19</sup> Graham A. J. Rogers observes that Locke "did not enjoy his schooling" and in his later life "attacked boarding schools for their overemphasis on corporal punishment and for the uncivil behaviour of pupils."

<sup>20</sup> The anonymous author of the "Claude-Adiren Helvétius" entry for *Encyclopaedia Britannica* states, "[Helvétius] is remembered for his hedonistic emphasis on physical sensation, his attack on the religious foundations of ethics, and his extravagant educational theory."

in her defence of Helvétius, published in both the June 1796 and the January 1797 issues of the *Monthly Magazine* in response to the strictures of “J. T.” on Helvetius’s disquisition on the influence of education and circumstances (“Reply to J. T.” 385-87; “Defence of Helvetius” 26-28). Nevertheless, Hays was not a submissive follower of either philosopher. At the point where Locke’s and Helvétius’s views on whether or not human temperaments were innate seemed to clash, Hays offered an explanation and bridged the gap. While Helvétius appeared to confine the power of chance to the period between a person’s birth and death, Hays extended it to include the period of gestation. Hence, Locke’s so-called “native propensitives” were what Hays came to see as the result of chance—“an infinity of little accidents” in Helvétius’s words (1: 27)—and termed “hereditary temperament” (“Reply to J. T.” 387). She argued that “bodily as well as mental powers are principally attributable to education and habits, and are equally the result of the circumstances in which the being may have been placed; some of these circumstances may have been previous to birth” (387). In *Family Annals*, Hays’s belief in the occurrence of different natural temperaments in members of the same family could be perceived in her portrayal of young Mr. Seymour, whose character is a contradictory mixture of romantic and worldly elements, the dominant characteristics of Ellen and Charlotte respectively. As Charlotte writes to Ellen to urge the latter to intervene in her brother’s imprudent attachment to a beautiful but vain and penniless young lady, she comments, “In the character of his mind are strangely blended those of both his sisters, more impassioned than Ellen, and with all her melting tenderness, he has the vivacity, the inconsiderateness, the profuse and improvident habits of the less estimable Charlotte” (*Family Annals* 48-49).

With regard to the respective merits of education at home or in school, Hays was neutral. In *Family Annals* education is received in a variety of forms: for example, the children of the Nevilles are educated at home by their parents (105), the son of the wealthy and generous baronet in the neighborhood of their Welsh hut is tutored by Mr. Neville (139), and the offspring of the poor in the village take their lessons in the village school sponsored by the fund administered according to the benevolent plans of the rectory (141). Obviously, in Hays’s view, education could be conducted in any way so long as it suited the individual’s circumstances and needs. Hence, for people whose parents could afford neither school fees nor the salary of a tutor, reading fictitious histories could be an alternative and could well serve an educational aim. It is important to note that the amount of attention she pays to the education of the poor sets Hays apart not only from Locke but also from Helvétius.

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*Family Annals*,  
or the Sisters**

Furthermore, though Hays did not believe it was impossible to eradicate bad habits, she was apparently less optimistic than Locke and Helvétius. In Hays's view, to uproot the ill habits one had been long accustomed to was no easy task, and an extraordinarily strong will power was the prerequisite for achieving it. Through Ellen's lips, Hays sends the reader a message that resolution is the key: "Habits are not, though strong, unconquerable to the determined mind: to the resolution which the breaking of them requires we feel ourselves not unequal" (74). Nevertheless, she casts doubt on its practicability through her presentations of Charlotte's and young Mr. Seymour's loose resolution and ill-fated attempts to apply it. Throughout her career of pecuniary mismanagement, Charlotte has made attempts to retrench her expenses, first by removing herself from London to reside with the Nevilles in Wales and then by travelling with her brother and sister-in-law to the presumably less expensive cities on the continent. But while the first plan is cut short because of her longing for worldly stimulants, the second turns out to be abortive owing to her relapse into old customs of indulging herself in show and amusements.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, the brother appears no less blind to his own capability to keep his resolution than Charlotte, as his well-meant removal to the continent serves only to compound his original monetary blunders by plunging him into insolvency.<sup>22</sup>

Moreover, Hays was more appalled than Locke and Helvétius by the harm miseducation might do to young people. To Hays, the mischief made by a false education should never be underestimated. As illustrated in her portrayal of Charlotte's and her brother's profligacy and improvidence, more often than not, it could prove fatal to its victims and send them to premature death. In *Family Annals*, Hays suggests that a proper education on economy at an early age would prevent many individuals from similar catastrophes.

The importance of an economic education for children is brought to parents' attention in the last chapter, "On Prudence and Economy," of *Practical Education* by Maria and Richard Lovell Edgeworth. There they assert that economy is more than the management of money and "may be shewn on many other occasions" (2: 702). Nevertheless, a formal education was an unattainable luxury to the majority of people in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England: a half of its citizens—women—were not allowed to receive it, and a great number of men lower down the social ladder had neither money nor time for it. With their increasing availability and popularity, novels were thus enlisted to impart to

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<sup>21</sup> Concerning Charlotte's financial mismanagement, see *Family Annals* 144-52, 155-58.

<sup>22</sup> As regards young Mr. Seymour's failure to retrench his expenses, see *Family Annals* 151, 157-58.

more English people the knowledge that would be essential to their well-being.

Like the Edgeworths and many other Georgian conduct book writers, Hays was convinced that economy was not confined to monetary matters. In *Family Annals*, she provides instructions on the management of money along with those on the education of children and the supervision of the household. But unlike the Edgeworths, whose economic thoughts generally complied with established gender and social norms, Hays inserted in her advice on economy critiques of the laws of primogeniture and radical concepts of human equality. Since Hays's views on the education of children have already been examined, this study will now focus on the management of money and the supervision of the household.

Among the numerous issues of economy, monetary matters are the first things that Hays urges her readers to attend to and to take pains to master. Hays might have touched upon in her debut novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796) the “gothic economics” ubiquitous in the Georgian Era and commonly portrayed by a great number of eighteenth-century women novelists, as observed by Edmund Copeland in *Women Writing about Money: Women's Fiction in England, 1790-1820* (1995) (26, 35-60). Twenty-one years later, in *Family Annals*, the more life-weary but wiser Hays chose to shrug aside that intimidating picture of women's circumstances and concentrated on implanting in people's minds concepts that would facilitate the efficient management of their finances.

Hays upholds “a wise economy” (*Family Annals* 29)—a person's ability to spend within his or her income—as the governing principle of expenditure. In her view, the ability to keep expenditure within the limits of one's annual income is inseparably associated with everything that is treasured most in life, including “liberty, independence, respectability of character and dignity of mind” (29). In the novel, Ellen's relatively peaceful and pleasant life is a result of her persistence in living according to her rank and circumstances. As Mr. Seymour points out to Charlotte why “the same quarterly allowance” he gives to both of his daughters turns out to be insufficient to her only, he says,

[Since] you take . . . less care of your clothes when purchased, of course your wardrobe requires to be more frequently replenished. I have often observed, and with pleasure, that Ellen, though never fine or over-dressed, is always perfectly neat and even elegant in her appearance. . . . Ellen has acquired over herself a voluntary power; she knows how to refuse to herself what it would be imprudent to grant; she is neither ostentatious nor infirm of purpose; thus, when principle calls upon her and duty points, she is able to be generous to others and just to herself. (5-7)

Ellen's "simple and unexpensive habits" (57), mastery of arithmetic (58-59), habitual frugality (5, 9) and careful treatment of her belongings (5) all contribute to the soundness of her financial position. Her conduct exemplifies Hays's all-important "wise economy." As Mr. Seymour cautions Charlotte, any person "who exceeds his income one year will be still more embarrassed in the next; to embarrassment, distress will succeed; and ruin and disgrace will terminate the scene" (29). Hays forewarns that one will inevitably meet a calamitous end if he or she fails to manage finance with prudence.

In addition, Hays maintains that in self-denial lie "the true art of economy" and "true spirit of generosity," and that truly liberal acts should not be confused with thoughtless spending (6). Her views are explicitly revealed through Mr. Seymour's rejection of his sister's excuses for Charlotte's repeated pecuniary embarrassment. Mrs. Percy praises Charlotte as "an open-hearted generous girl" because she is fond of giving little presents to friends and acquaintances, and to domestics in their own household and those in the places she visits; far from concurring with his sister's view, Mr. Seymour denounces it as "an idle and pernicious ostentation" arising from Charlotte's "vanity" (2-3). He remarks that "of true generosity some self-denial must make a part," and that liberality needs to be tempered by prudence (3-4). In addition, he points out that "the true art of economy, like the true spirit of generosity, has its origin in *self-denial*; without it no fortune will prove sufficient, nor will there be any merit in bestowing" (6).

Nevertheless, what Hays means by "self-denial" is far from what is practiced by the miser who denies himself all "necessary comforts" (48) and has no clue about the utility of money.<sup>23</sup> As Ellen declines her brother's pecuniary offers, she assures him that while her family contract their wants, they will still have the "necessaries" and "the decent comforts of life" (73). In addition, through a letter where Ellen responds to Charlotte's invocation of Mandeville's controversial treatise *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* (1723), which avers "private vices" are "public benefits," to justify her indulgence in luxury and pleasure, Hays places herself as a vindicator of Mandeville, calling him "that dangerous because ill understood writer" (110, 123). In the letter, Ellen tells Charlotte:

That the wealth of a nation, a commercial and manufacturing nation, may receive and encrease from the luxury of its inhabitants, which, ever craving,

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<sup>23</sup> For Hays's comment on the miser, see Hays to William Godwin, Hatton Garden, 1 October 1795 (*Correspondence* 400).

affords a stimulus to ingenuity, to industry, to the inventive arts, is a position that I will not attempt to dispute; and more than this I trust, was not meant by the author of the Fable of the Bees. . . . Luxury, to a certain degree, as an extension and general diffusion of the decent comforts of social life, and even as connected with refinement of feeling and of mind, is, I grant you, a good to be desired. But, like all other things, it has its limits, beyond which it cannot with impunity pass; an observation that may be extended to commerce itself, that source of freedom, of improved civilization, of all that gives dignity and value to life,—these are truths attested by history in every page. (123-24)

*The Fable of the Bees*, according to Phyllis Vandenberg and Abigail DeHart, was widely misread by Mandeville's contemporaries, who took the book to be actively promoting vice as "the singular explanation and precondition for a thriving economic society." David Hume (1711-1776), Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), and Adam Smith (1723-1790)—Mandeville's "philosophically significant adversaries"—all shaped their seminal works "in confrontations with *The Fable of the Bees*" (Hundert 3). Yet unlike Hume, Rousseau, and Smith, Hays in *Family Annals* concurs with the thesis of Mandeville's masterpiece.<sup>24</sup> She conceives that the individual's vices such as vanity and greed are prerequisites to national wealth. Hays admits that so long as luxury and commerce are practiced within reasonable bounds, they give rise to comfort and convenience appertaining to a desirable life.

Moreover, as Ellen's exemplary self-control enables her to contribute to the welfare of others, there are sacrifices that she justifiably refuses to make. When Mr. Seymour acquaints Ellen with a proposal made by the old and affluent Mr. Wycherley, which she immediately declines, he reminds her that the marriage will empower her to do good to others. However, this admirable ability cannot tempt Ellen to sacrifice her own happiness. She tells her father, "Wealth does not enter into my scheme of happiness" (9); she is determined to marry neither for money nor for the power to do good to others, but only for love. From Ellen's insistence on putting her own conjugal happiness first, it is obvious that Hays deems it unnecessary, or even unnatural, that people should renounce their personal fulfillment in the cause of altruism.

In Hays's view, charitable works were not necessarily related to money and could take a variety of forms. In her description of all the benevolent projects

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<sup>24</sup> Hundert notes that Mandeville "did his most creative work" and published *The Fable of the Bees*, his "masterpiece," "during what until recently was considered the onset of old age" (2).

and institutions in which the Nevilles and their charitable new neighbors are involved, Hays proposes a more reasonable and practicable benevolence, suggesting that benefactors and benefactresses should prudently take their own situations into consideration when doing good to others, so that they will not impoverish or exhaust themselves while helping others. According to Ellen's letter to Charlotte relating the "many delightful occupations," she and her husband are busy in their new neighborhood; the good people there adopt various ways, based on their own circumstances, to improve the lives of others (139-42). Some of these projects are designed to spread the practice of wise economy even further by encouraging it in their beneficiaries:

My Neville and myself give to the projects and institutions of these excellent people the little aid that is in our power. A village school, a bank well secured for the savings of the labouring poor, loans for the assistance of their temporary exigencies, a fund for the aged and infirm, rewards for the sober and industrious, reproofs and privations for the refractory and wilful, instruction for the ignorant and council<sup>25</sup> for the humble and diligent, are among the means of reformation employed. The good baronet, as magistrate for the district, lends to us occasionally his weight and his purse. (141-42)

This passage, as it bears traces of the founding principles of the Prudent Man's Friend Society in "promoting provident habits and a spirit of *independence* among the poor" (*The Gentleman's Magazine* 251), reveals the society's influence on Hays during the years when she resided at the Hot-Wells.<sup>26</sup> In addition, here Hays succinctly outlines a cutting-edge scheme of charity and reformation, involving people of all ranks, and indicates that every individual, including those in need, should make an effort and be held responsible for enhancing not only their own personal welfare but also that of the community each belongs to. Moreover, as Hays paid respect to the society's "principles of active benevolence and enlightened charity" (251), she found it necessary to implement a more balanced and rational mode of philanthropy. From the passages above, there is no doubt that Hays was concerned about the welfare of both givers and receivers of alms. As she continued to help advance the condition and felicity of the poor, she deemed

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<sup>25</sup> Here Hays has made a mistake: "council" should be "counsel."

<sup>26</sup> From 1814 to 1817 Hays resided at the Hot-Wells, boarding with the Penningtons (Brooks 499-504, 584; Whelan, *Mary Hays*). In the postscript to her penultimate novel *The Brothers* (1815), Hays recounts her being attracted to The Prudent Man's Society (*The Gentleman's Magazine* 251-52). For information about this benevolent institution, see "Annual Report" 23-27 and Evans 79.

it imperative for the benefactors and benefactresses to take care of themselves before helping the needy.

Generally, Hays shared the Edgeworths' views on the proper ways to spend one's annual income, as expressed in their chapter on prudence and economy in *Practical Education*. Taking "waste not, want not" as their maxim, the Edgeworths urge that "early habits of care" be cultivated in children, and suggest that girls learn arithmetic and use it to calculate their daily expenses, while boys should acquire the "power of estimating" to protect themselves against "the low frauds of designing workmen" (2: 703-05, 707, 711). They also highlight the role of prudence in charitable acts and consider self-denial requisite for benevolence (1: 286; 2: 703).

However, Hays was at variance with the Edgeworths on at least two points where the latter conformed to contemporary gendered biases. Firstly, as the Edgeworths define economy as "an essential domestic virtue" in women (2: 701), they imply that economy is unnecessary for men, who have nothing to do with what is happening at home. This reveals the Edgeworths' compliance with the gendered ideology of separate spheres, associating women with private and men with public spaces, which in effect helped instill a gendered binary in readers that would further reinforce their prejudice against gender equality. On the contrary, Hays did not take economy for a gendered virtue. She held that both men and women should bear its principles in mind and put them into practice. In the novel, economy is presented as both a science and a virtue that should be acquired by anyone who desires to lead a reasonably happy life, regardless of gender. Hence, Mr. Seymour and his elder daughter Ellen are both portrayed as models of wise economy. Failure to live within one's means—improvidence—is depicted as a delinquency that characters of both genders are equally susceptible to, and its consequences are shown in the ruin of Charlotte and in the woeful ends of both her husband and her brother.<sup>27</sup>

Secondly, the Edgeworths concur with the commonly accepted notion that sons are more disposed to extravagance than daughters, ascribing it to the temptations they are exposed to and advocating that sons be treated with more indulgence than daughters. They advise a father not to impose "rigid economy" on his son, but to show both his confidence in him and his understanding of "the fallibility of youthful prudence," as well as to open his purse to him when he is in distress (2: 706). Without investigating why more temptations are lurking in the

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<sup>27</sup> For Charlotte's and young Mr. Seymour's mismanagement of finance, see *Family Annals* 158, 176-77, and 133-34, 174, respectively.

world to lure men into purchasing more than they need or spending more than they can afford, the Edgeworths take the way of the world for granted. Their adherence to things as they are—the system of primogeniture in particular—is in fact what underlies those seemingly faultless counsels. Unlike the Edgeworths, Hays in *Family Annals* questions this unjust system and points out that this very system, by unfairly bequeathing to the first-born son all the property of a family, should be held responsible for the tendency to extravagance in men.

Hays criticizes primogeniture by laying bare Mr. Seymour's unequal distribution of property to his children and his double standard in viewing Charlotte's and her brother's spirit of liberality. Feeling his life is heading towards its end, Mr. Seymour tells his daughters what he will leave to each of his children and unwittingly reveals his compliance with the ancient customs:

My estate will be your brother's; it is not large, and very inadequate to the *really* generous and magnificent spirit which he possesses; a spirit which is not, I fear, with all his high and noble qualities, sufficiently balanced by discretion, or a calculation of consequences. Three thousand pounds each, is all that I can bequeath to my daughters; a fortune that, with the utmost prudence, will, unmarried, be but barely sufficient to their independence; and that will scarcely entitle them to form very splendid alliances. (8)

Hays's narrative implies that Mr. Seymour's settlement on his son is much more than necessary for his independence, while the sum settled on each of the daughters requires the most careful management to support them, unless they make financially advantageous marriages—an unlikely prospect because of their small fortunes. Preposterously, even though he knows that the amount he bestows on his daughters can barely sustain them, his only regret is that he is not giving his son enough money to meet the expenses of the high life he seems to be entitled to. Hays thereby uncovers the absurdity inherent in the practice of primogeniture. The fact that Mr. Seymour is aware of his son's irresponsible extravagance makes the situation even more ludicrous: it makes nonsense of the laws which unconditionally endow the eldest son with a family's property when his father dies. Hays portrays Mr. Seymour as a product of the education he has received and of the society he belongs to, who cannot entirely free himself from all the evils inherent in that society. And because Mr. Seymour is following ancestral customs in acting like other propertied fathers, it never occurs to him that he is being unfair to his children by repeating one of society's flagrant wrongs. It is obvious that where the distribution of property is concerned, Hays concurs with

the opinion Wollstonecraft states in *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) that property—“*the one thing needful*”—should be “more equally divided amongst all the children of a family” (23-24).

Moreover, although we have seen that Mr. Seymour frowns on Charlotte’s failure to live on her allowance, and launches into a harangue claiming that self-denial and prudence are requisite for the practice of liberality, he no longer insists on conveying this essential guidance to his son, but turns into an indulgent and anxious father, uttering a gloomy prophecy which comes to pass when the son squanders his patrimonial fortune “in thoughtless profusion, and in lavish and ill-judged generosity” (165). Obviously, Mr. Seymour is not a faultless father. To be sure, he may have succeeded in setting a good example in his conduct and domestic management for Ellen to emulate at home, but neglecting to instill in his heir the cardinal principles of economy is an abysmal failure, which inevitably sends the heir to an early grave. The improvident heir may appear a downright “spendthrift” in Susan Brown, Patricia Clements, and Isobel Grundy’s view, but in Hays’s eyes, he deserves sympathy. By young Mr. Seymour’s tragic end, Hays implies that even though they may unjustly receive a far greater share of the family wealth, men do not fare better than women: all are victims to the system of primogeniture.

As regards the supervision of the household, the Edgeworths and Hays all considered order exceedingly essential. In *Practical Education*, the Edgeworths advise parents to create a taste for order in their children by showing them its advantages in both practice and theory (2: 702). They suggest that parents provide their daughters “convenient places for the preservation and arrangement of their little goods” (2: 702). Taking “the love of order” as “the foundation of every virtue” (*Letters and Essays* 98), Hays emphasizes order through presentations of Ellen’s insistence on transforming the already very good order of her new household into “excellent order” (*Family Annals* 100) and of Ellen’s extraordinarily lengthy and fastidiously detailed description of her new home, provided with “the decent comforts of life” (73), in her first letter to Charlotte after their arrival. Ellen is so obsessed with the arrangement of the furniture and the layout of the garden that she goes so far as to launch a virtual tour of her new residence. She notes the tea equipage and candles along the fireplace in a parlor on the ground floor, and the identical color and pattern of the carpet and the paper covering the ceiling and walls; she gives an inventory of multifarious pieces of furniture—including two small couches, chairs, tables, window curtains, book shelves, and a small upright grand piano—in a back apartment (95-98). In addition, she describes the sundry flowers and trees, together with the mosaic pavement and a variety of other

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features in the back garden (96-97).

Servants are another major concern in relation to the overseeing of the household. On this point, the Edgeworths and Hays were at odds. The Edgeworths did not think highly of the servants. Like John Locke in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, their preference of domestic to school education comes with the caveat that children should be kept away from the society of servants and from “persons who have the habits of meanness and cunning” (2: 717) to avoid contracting ill habits from unsavory examples. By indiscriminately associating servants with dishonest people, the Edgeworths unwittingly reveal their prejudice against people who, in Hays’s view, are allotted to servility by chance (*Family Annals* 103).<sup>28</sup>

In fact, Locke and Helvétius, like the Edgeworths, both expose their limited views in respect of servants in their educational treatises, which blatantly conflict with their enlightened ideas in promoting liberal thinking to build a better world for the whole human species. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, Locke appears to tune his advice to his usual progressive notions by admonishing his friend to set an example for his children in treating their inferiors, including the servants of the house, with civil language and deportment in order to instill in them “sentiments of humanity” (136). He considers the domestics brothers whom fortune has laid “below the level of others, and at their master’s feet” (137). However, he contradicts this precept from time to time by reiterating a few derogatory expressions about his so-called unfortunate brothers, contemptuously dubbing them “foolish servants,” “foolish flatterers,” or “unbred or debauched servants” (17, 50, 62-63), as he counsels his friend to keep children from all possible ill influence—“the contagion” and “the taint” in his words—they may receive from servants and from people of the lower classes (62, 70). Locke’s occasional expressions of disdain for the servant class in a guide to children’s education severely blunt the liberal concepts that he promoted throughout his life.

Helvétius, though noted for his determined and heroic combat against the malevolent political and religious environment resulting from the customs nourished by the Catholic Church, did not utterly escape the execrable influence of habitual practices. He joined Locke and many others in reinforcing stereotypical images of people whom accidents had rendered socially inferior to himself and his middle-class readers. Helvétius considers it impracticable to instruct the domestics so as to render them examples to the children by their conduct and

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<sup>28</sup> For more information concerning Hays’s view of domestics, see *Appeal* 243-45 for example.

conversation. According to Helvétius, it might be impossible to civilize all the domestics in a household, and “one brutal or flattering valet [will] be sufficient to destroy a whole education” (2: 29-30).

Hays’s radicalism is not restricted to her vindication of women’s rights, but extends further to her advocacy of equality among all human beings. Compared with those of Locke, Helvétius, and the Edgeworths, Hays’s view of servants is more consistent with the enlightened notions that men are born equal and that their worth does not lie in their social status, but in themselves. In *Family Annals*, Hays endeavors to avoid conventionally derogatory depictions of members of the servant class, whom she considers “equals” to their masters and mistresses (*The Victim of Prejudice* 155). Refusing to perpetuate the false image of obsequious and vulgar servants, Hays presents portraits of decent, reliable and improvable domestics in the novel.

Hays’s egalitarian beliefs are unequivocally conveyed through Ellen’s descriptions of and interactions with the rural family she comes to know and employ after her own family arrive in their rural home in Wales. At the first sight of the elderly woman who has been waiting in the cottage for their arrival, Ellen finds her clean, healthy, and well-mannered, and observes that she has thoughtfully and neatly arranged a comfortable home to greet them: “Here we found a cheerful fire blazing on the hearth, some showers having in the course of the day a little chilled the atmosphere; the tea equipage arranged in exact order, and two candles burning on the table” (*Family Annals* 89-90). Believing that fortune and rank are accidental gifts from the Almighty Being, Ellen shows the respect she owes to every fellow human being, whatever their circumstances. In a letter to Charlotte, she calls her new acquaintance “the good woman” and praises the “clean, hale, rosy cheek” of her housemaid, the cook’s daughter (90, 101). In addition, Ellen takes care to cultivate in the domestics the useful knowledge she has learned from her deceased father in youth; this will equip them with necessary skills and instill in them the moral lessons that will render them suitable companions to her children. She tells Charlotte in the same letter,

The whole family [the cook, the house maid and her husband, who is bailiff to the farm] stood in need of some teaching and disciplining, but, thanks to my wise and worthy father, the ornamental . . . formed but a subordinate part of my early training: to a knowledge of the useful, I was taught, the first and the longest attention was due. (101)

Ellen also considers that, owing to the domestics’ having few opportunities to

learn what is right and proper, masters and mistresses need to practice “patience and forbearance” (103) with them, and they are advised to control their passions and set examples for the servants and children:

Servitude, at best, is a hard lot; perhaps it has also some tendency to degrade the being, since all masters and mistresses do not abstain from abusing the power which it gives to them: it is therefore our duty to make allowances, and in this, as in all cases, put in practice the christian maxim, of doing unto others as, were we in their circumstances, we would they should do unto us. The management of servants and of children has in it this common, that *example* is of more importance than precept: by tyranny, caprice, or intemperate language towards either, we lower ourselves to their level. If we have not our passions and tempers under controul, how can we expect, how dare we exact it of those whose advantages have been so inferior to our own. (103-04)

In addition, Ellen neither forbids her children to associate with the maid, cook, and manservant nor looks down on these diligent people who do the menial work for her family. Instead, she considers them as “positive blessings” and feels grateful for all the assistance they offer her with the chores.<sup>29</sup>

Above all, Hays was unrelentingly egalitarian. Through making Ellen abide by the Christian maxim, “doing unto others as, were we in their circumstances, we would they should do unto us” (103), Hays suggests that empathy should be the key to the superintendence of domestics, which she put into practice in real life. Indeed, Hays was no less generous than Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), who treated his Jamaican servant Francis Barber (c. 1742/3-1801) like his own son, sending him to school and making Barber his heir in his will.<sup>30</sup> As Hays told Robert Crabb Robinson (1775-1867) in a letter dated 10 September 1804, she respected and treated her maid as a friend, despite her humble origin (*Correspondence* 569). When Hays moved to her cottage at Camberwell in 1804, her maid was the only other inmate in the household, and both “duty and inclination” compelled Hays to serve as a nurse when her maid was ill.<sup>31</sup>

Hays’s description of the relationships between the Nevilles and their domestics, together with her care for her maid, well exemplify the idiom “charity begins

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<sup>29</sup> In *Appeal*, Hays expresses her liberal notions in regard to domestics and dependents, advising that people take their servants as “positive blessings” (242-45).

<sup>30</sup> See Bundoock. According to Bundoock, when Johnson died, he left seven hundred and fifty pounds in the trust of Bennet Langton (1736-1801), who paid an annuity of seventy pounds to Barber according to Johnson’s wish (168).

<sup>31</sup> Hays to Henry Crabb Robinson, Islington, 14 February 1806 (*Correspondence* 571).

at home,” which exactly manifests the sense of charity Wollstonecraft upheld: “an intercourse of good offices and mutual benefits, founded on respect for justice and humanity” (9). Locke, Helvétius, and the Edgeworths, with all their progressive notions and constant recommendations of liberality in giving alms and other assistance to the poor, shared a consciousness of class distinctions that extended for more than a century. As a consequence, they appeared inconsistent when they advised parents to keep a distance between their children and the domestics by reiterating and further reinforcing general prejudices against servants. As they instructed parents to despise and mistrust those who lived with them and took care of their household chores and who, in the broadest sense of the word, were part of their family, but to be sympathetic and kind to the needy in the public sphere, they were actually encouraging parents to indulge in an insidious form of double standard. Parents’ inconsistent treatment of the inferiors within and without would have undermined whatever examples they had set for their children, as well as their careful teachings about humanity. On the contrary, Hays was convinced that parents’ treating the domestics as their equals would set a guiding example for their children to follow, and that educating the domestics would be the best method for masters and mistresses to ensure that their children would be surrounded by good examples at home.

Without doubt, in *Family Annals* Hays makes use of her system of economic education to continue proclaiming gender equality and at the same time propound the concept of egalitarianism, a fact that has been overlooked by scholars Joyce Marjorie Sanxter Tompkins and Ty as they underrate the intellectual courage and resilience Hays exerted when facing the “anti-feminist backlash” (Kuiper xvi) after the French Revolution, and the posthumous revelations of scandalous episodes in Wollstonecraft’s life near the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>32</sup> The passages quoted in this study evidently contradict Tompkins’s assertion that when writing *Family Annals* Hays had left out her “old leaven” (188)—a term Tompkins uses ironically to describe Hays’s justifiable vindication of women’s rights in her 1790s works—as well as Ty’s claim about Hays’s turning “much more conservative in the latter half of her life” (xxxii). As Hilary Havens’s edited book *Didactic Novels and British Women’s Writing 1790-1820* (2017) has shown, novels with didactic messages published in the post-Revolutionary era accommodated “a spectrum of ideologies—from radical to conservative—which allowed women to blur or question political distinctions” (1-2). The increasing didacticism in

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<sup>32</sup> For more information concerning British anti-revolution and anti-feminism in the post-Revolutionary era, see Kuiper xv-xvi.

Hays's later novels, observed by Ty, instead of indicating her concession to orthodox views, discloses her combination of pedagogical theory and practice which, as she grew older, she perceived would more effectively implant her revolutionary ideas in the minds of readers, a happy outcome of her earlier experiences as novelist, writer of books for the young, and educator for her nephews and nieces.<sup>33</sup> With its "transparently didactic intent and technique" (Brown, Clements, and Grundy), *Family Annals* demonstrates Hays's unwaning and yet evolving radicalism in the later stage of her writing career. While unswervingly maintaining Hays's 1790s feminist assertions, the novel moves further to promote liberal notions for all.

## Conclusion

Mary Hays understood that customs to society were like habits to an individual, and that both were subject to change. While contrary habits, time, and resolution were able to uproot a person's long established ill habits, widespread radical ideas and the perseverance of avant-garde writers could eventually prove the absurdities of false customs and dispel "the mists of prejudice" (Hays, "Remarks" 470). Hays prophesied that with the progress of knowledge and people's increasing access to it through diverse forms of education, "all things will become new" (*Memoirs of Queens* 127).

Hays was forward-looking in inserting into her teachings on economy her conviction of equality between the sexes and among all human beings. She adapted to *Family Annals* the fundamental ideas on early education and habits that Locke and Helvétius had laid out in their theses, together with the ideas on economy that the Edgeworths had fervently promoted. Being simplified, freed of much of their class biases, and implanted into Hays's storyline, these relatively abstruse concepts would be more widely dispersed and benefit a wider range of people, particularly those who, though having little or no education, were still

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<sup>33</sup> Chen, "This Eccentric Step" 41-42. In response to the author's message, thanking him for creating the Mary Hays website—"Mary Hays: Life, Writings, and Correspondence"—that allows the public free access to all the materials he has transcribed and accumulated, Whelan makes an observation about current misconceptions with regard to Hays's teaching:

Hays did not operate a school in Islington, but she did teach her three Dunkin nieces for most of 1807-08 before leaving to live with her brother Thomas in Wandsworth, where she also taught some of his children. She would do this later in the 1830s with the children of her brother John, so teaching is essential to Hays, but not in an official capacity. . . . She lives at Mrs. Mackie's in Oundle and Mrs. Fenn's in Peckham and with Mrs. Browne in Vanbrugh Castle, all of whom operated schools, but she is only a boarder, never a teacher at [these] schools.

capable of enjoying a tale. Most important of all, through her novel Hays instilled in the readers, those lower down the social ladder in particular, the ideas of egalitarianism, which made them recognize their worth and led them to realize that human beings are interdependent and that they were as respectable as the gentry, despite their circumstances. In the end, we can say that Mary Hays's utilization of the novel's instructive power and her egalitarian notions of economy joined forces in her attempt to equip her readership with the useful knowledge and self-esteem that would enable them to improve themselves intellectually and economically, and ultimately to be independent of the manacles of customs and free from the despondency of poverty.

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\*\*Manuscript received 7 Mar. 2019,  
accepted for publication 18 May 2020